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Human resources management

Joint Inspection Unit

Age structure of human resources in the organizations of the United Nations system

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit for the consideration of the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Age structure of human resources in the organizations of the United Nations system" (see A/62/628).

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Summary

The report of the United Nations System Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "Age structure of human resources in the organizations of the United Nations system" studies the impact on the system of an ageing staff population. Within its eight recommendations, JIU presents several measures that organizations can take to create a more balanced age structure, including creating more junior level posts, reviewing the standards of eligibility for these posts and others that concentrate on reducing the impact of a large number of senior staff retiring over the next several years.

The present report presents the views of United Nations system organizations on the recommendations provided in the JIU report. The views of the system have been consolidated on the basis of inputs provided by United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) member organizations. CEB members welcome the detailed survey contained in the report and generally accept the recommendations contained within it. They note that many of the issues are already the subject of inter-agency discussion through the CEB Human Resources Network. Many organizations report that the substance of many of the recommendations have either already been implemented or are in the process of implementation in line with current Human Resources Management reform initiatives. They expressed concern about the recommendation relating to raising the mandatory retirement age, noting that this may have a negative effect on the current age structure, as well as funding implications, but agree that it merits further examination.

I. Introduction

1. The Joint Inspection Unit report entitled "Age structure of human resources in the organizations of the United Nations system" (see A/62/628) addresses the impact on the system of an ageing staff population and concludes that a more balanced age structure would provide benefits to the system. To address this imbalance, the report suggests, within its eight recommendations (equally divided between those directed at legislative bodies and executive heads), several steps that organizations can take to create a more balanced age structure, including measures to attract young professionals and a review of the standards of eligibility for junior level posts. Further recommendations concentrate on reducing the impact of a large number of senior staff retiring over the next several years, including additional work on succession planning and a review of the mandatory retirement age.

II. General comments

2. The members of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) welcome this report, and note that it provides an excellent review of an important subject. They note that this was also the view of participants at the July 2007 meeting of the CEB Human Resources Network, where the report was discussed. Organizations especially appreciate the comprehensive survey of JIU of the subject, the relevance of which they believe goes beyond the human resources area and is also important for senior management in terms of the legal and financial consequences of some of its findings concerning age structure, entitlement trends and the increasing proportion of retired versus active staff.

3. However, some organizations indicate that certain proposals, such as the possibility of raising the age of retirement, appear premature, and are at odds with the principle of bringing new blood to organizations' management teams, one of the key recommendations of the report.

III. Specific comments on recommendations

JIU recommendation 1

The legislative body of each organization of the United Nations system should (a) request its executive head to provide detailed and analytical information regarding age structure and other related information as part of a periodic human resources management report; and (b) set targets, establish benchmarks, and use them to monitor the measures taken by the organization to address the potential impact of ageing of its staff members.

4. In commenting on this recommendation, organizations stressed their existing efforts to collect and report to their legislative bodies detailed information regarding staff demographics. Many indicated existing efforts to track data related to the age structure of their organizations as part of existing human resource reform efforts. Some also noted that the required age structure may depend on the mandate and needs of an organization.

JIU recommendation 2

The legislative body of each organization of the United Nations system should request its executive head to review the staffing structure of his or her organization in order to establish a balanced staff grade structure. To rejuvenate the staffing structure, more junior level posts (at P-2 and P-3 levels) should be established to attract young professionals. To achieve this, adequate cooperation and coordination between the human resources/finance divisions and the substantive divisions should be ensured.

5. While CEB members understand the need for a balanced staff grade structure, many indicate that such reviews have already been conducted recently with the conclusion that such structures already exist or practices to achieve a balanced structure are already being implemented.

JIU recommendation 3

Executive heads of each United Nations system organization should review, in consultation with ICSC and the CEB Human Resources Network, the standards of eligibility requirements for posts at and below the P-3 level, placing more emphasis on educational qualifications, technical skills and potential performance.

6. Organizations generally agree with this recommendation and many note that they already have well developed standards of recruitment for posts at and below the P-3 level. Many also note that existing policies emphasize competency, proficiency and other qualifications (such as education) before years of experience when considering candidates for all posts.

JIU recommendation 4

Executive heads of each United Nations system organization should (a) undertake special measures to ensure the influx of young professionals through special recruitment drives; (b) strengthen the career development prospects for young professionals through enhanced training and staff development; (c) allocate adequate resources for training and staff development activities; and (d) adequately address the work/life issues of staff members with special attention to the family-related issues of young professionals.

7. CEB members generally agree with the actions specified in recommendation 4 and note that many are currently either under consideration in their agencies or already undergoing implementation. An example is the holding of the well-established national competitive recruitment examinations and language examinations at the United Nations, which encourages the employment of young professionals at the entry level, as well as the junior professional officer programme implemented at many organizations. In addition, organizations indicate that they have many policies related to work/life balance, including, inter alia, telecommuting, flexible hours of work, part-time employment, spouse employment and paternity leave.

JIU recommendation 5

Legislative bodies of the United Nations system organizations should request the executive management to (a) submit regular reports showing retirement

forecasts; (b) establish performance indicators to forecast replacement needs and monitor their implementation; and (c) take adequate measures to ensure proper knowledge transfer and safeguard institutional memory.

8. Organizations note that while this recommendation is directed at legislative bodies, many have already been requested to move in the direction indicated in the recommendation. For example, the United Nations notes that analytical information on retirement forecasts is currently provided in the annual reports of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat and biennial reports on the employment of retirees.

JIU recommendation 6

Executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should request the CEB secretariat, through its Human Resources Network, to assess the current status of succession planning in these organizations, and include succession planning on the agenda for in-depth discussion at its regular meetings, with a view to developing policies and a framework for succession planning, using the broad benchmarks provided in this report, for adoption by the United Nations system.

9. While many CEB members indicate that succession planning is already part of their existing human resources policy framework, they nevertheless concur with the proposal that the CEB secretariat, through its Human Resources Network, should proceed with developing these policies further and note that the Network has begun these discussions.

JIU recommendation 7

The General Assembly should request the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in his capacity as the chairperson of CEB, to initiate a review, with the involvement of the UNJSPF Board and ICSC, on the possibility of changing the mandatory age of separation in view of the number of impending retirements in the United Nations system, with due consideration to the increase in life expectancy at the age of 60.

10. Organizations of the system take note of this recommendation with interest and, while they generally accept the value of doing a study on the impact of changing the mandatory retirement age, they note that this change will affect the age structure of organizations in a way that contradicts previous recommendations intended to create a better age balance. Organizations note that any study must include a consideration of its funding aspects. For example, while increasing the mandatory age of retirement might reduce the after-service health insurance liabilities of the Member States, it also could increase the health insurance costs.

JIU recommendation 8

Executive heads of the United Nations system organizations, in coordination with CEB and ICSC, should review the existing regulations and financial limits relating to the employment of retirees, with a view to making them more flexible, and submit an appropriate proposal to their respective legislative bodies.

11. Organizations generally welcome this recommendation and concur with the proposal to review the existing regulations and financial limits relating to the employment of retirees. They note that increasing the financial limit with regard to the retirees would facilitate the implementation of recommendation 5 (c) regarding knowledge transfer.